

# GLOUCESTER RUGBY

SATURDAY, MARCH 7, 2009

WELFORD ROAD – GUINNESS PREMIERSHIP

DUPUY KICKS LIFE OUT OF GLOUCESTER

LEICESTER TIGERS 24 GLOUCESTER RUGBY 10

Match Report by Alastair Downey

Yet another riotous occasion in the Guinness Premiership – and although not up there with the vintage of the previous week against Bath it was yet more confirmation this is the tightest league in years.

Leicester thoroughly deserved their victory because they thoroughly dominated the contest. They had almost blanket control, particularly in the second half, and in Tom Croft and Benjamin Kayser had the defining players in the match.

Croft uses his physique and speed to maximum effectiveness, while Kayser ensured Leicester's set-piece quality never fell below the maximum and also carried ball the more the contest went on.

But this was not all bad for Gloucester either – despite their lack of possession and territory in the second half. The fact Leicester couldn't find their way across the line defied logic considering the amount of ball they had but it spoke volumes for Gloucester's defensive organisation and effort.

If they can re-summon this willingness, work ethic and energy until the end of the season they may well take some stopping because their sheer weight and determination against the tide was remarkable. Led and organised by another compelling performance from Gareth Delve, some titanic defence from Rory Lawson and the excellent Greg Somerville, Gloucester somehow kept out everything Leicester could throw at them from all points of Welford Road.

What they didn't have to go with their defensive qualities was a strike game to match. Both Charlie Sharples and Henry Trinder are great prospects but here Gloucester needed a Mike Tindall or James Simpson-Daniel to provide that extra power. That said, Sharples in particular had another very productive afternoon and the pair both emerged with considerable credit.

Gloucester were killed by the sheer number of penalties they conceded – some were just cheap and needless but others had the air of mystery about them. Referee Wayne Barnes could easily have dispatched someone to the cooler before he eventually sent Rory Lawson on the stroke of half-time for a deliberate knock-on when the scrum-half appeared to make a genuine attempt to catch the ball.

Julien Dupuy knocked over his fourth penalty of the half to hand Leicester a 12-10 interval lead and cancel out Gloucester's early advantage.

They had immediately got onto the front foot when Iain Balshaw picked off Sam Vesty's ambitious pass and went to the line for the game's only try. That was as good as it got for Gloucester on the scoreboard as Leicester thoroughly dominated.

Dupuy made them pay for the number of penalties they conceded but Gloucester at least managed to shut out the threat of Alesana Tuilagi – one tackle on him Delve almost defied belief – but this was an afternoon that Croft and Co. re-established themselves in the title race.

In the second half, Gloucester had no release valve, no avenue to escape. They were forced into kicking the scraps of possession they did get away because they were almost exclusively pinned inside their own half and it seemed only a matter of time before Leicester would penetrate their line.

The fact it never came defied the logic of the contest. Time and again Gloucester found a body to get in the way, a desperate scramble to get up and make another tackle and give them some hope of staying in the contest.

Dupuy's first-half accuracy disappeared immediately after the break as he missed three successive penalties and the longer Gloucester sat in the game with the likes of Delve, Alex Brown and Luke Narraway working overtime, the more chance they had of nicking something.

That chance almost came when they turned over possession and Barkley kicked in behind Leicester's defence, who were all up in attack. Sharples set off, bursting up the touchline and gathering the ball perfectly but he couldn't get away from the desperate tackle of Scott Hamilton and Geordan Murphy.

In truth, that moment went against the grain of the second half almost entirely. When Vesty wasn't looking to break, Hamilton, Croft or Aaron Mauger were spinning passes and making breaks against Gloucester's defensive pattern.

Balshaw made a brilliant tackle to stop Croft in full flight down the left and then shortly afterwards Lawson turned and dragged down Vesty as the stand-off threatened to break through from a scrum.

But both times Dupuy stepped up to knock over the penalty to send Leicester into clear water and when Brown was sinbinned for tackling Murphy without the ball, it effectively sealed the contest.

They somehow managed to hold out with three scrums on their own line and Martin Castrogiovani was hauled down twice almost over the line as Leicester searched for a way through that never came.

In the final knockings, Dupuy landed his seventh penalty and Murphy dropped a staggering goal a metre inside his own half to send Gloucester away empty handed in terms of points but with plenty they can be satisfied with.